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Participation in Bridging and Bonding Associations and Civic Attitudes: Evidence from Flanders

Hilde Coffé · Benny Geys

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Abstract Current scientific research and recent policy initiatives reveal an intense interest in the effect of social capital on a broad range of socioeconomic outcomes both at the individual level (e.g., civic attitudes) and the societal level (e.g., democratic or economic performance). Despite persistent argumentation in this debate that voluntary associations are of crucial importance in this process, empirical research usually reveals but a weak relation between membership and democratic (or civic) attitudes. In this paper, we follow recent arguments that various types of associations may play different roles. Specifically, we empirically distinguish between *bridging* and *bonding* associations based on the socioeconomic diversity within an association. Using a dataset on association membership in Flanders, we find empirical support for the view that individuals' values and attitudes indeed differ across members in (predominantly) bridging or bonding associations.

Résumé La recherche scientifique actuelle et les initiatives politiques récentes révèlent un intérêt très prononcé pour l'effet du capital social sur une large étendue de résultats socio-économiques, tant au niveau individuel (par exemple, les attitudes civiques) qu'au niveau de la société (par exemple, les performances démocratiques ou économiques). En dépit d'une argumentation persistante sur le débat consistant à soutenir que les associations bénévoles sont d'une importance cruciale dans ce processus, la recherche empirique montre, au contraire, une relation ténue entre les attitudes d'adhésion et les attitudes démocratiques (ou civiques). Dans cette étude, nous soutenons les arguments récents consistant à montrer que différents types d'associations sont à même de jouer différents rôles. Spécifiquement, nous faisons

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une distinction empirique entre les associations opérant un *relais* et celles opérant une *liaison* en se basant sur la diversité socio-économique au sein de l'association. En utilisant un ensemble de données en provenance d'une association se trouvant dans les Flandres, nous trouvons des preuves empiriques tendant à montrer que les valeurs et les attitudes des personnes diffèrent parmi les membres des associations de *relais* ou de *liaison*.

Zusammenfassung Die derzeitige wissenschaftliche Forschung und jüngste politische Initiativen offenbaren ein starkes Interesse am Effekt des Sozialkapitals auf ein breites Spektrum von sozioökonomischen Fragen, sowohl auf individuellem Niveau (z. B. soziales Verhalten) als auch auf gesellschaftlichem Niveau (z. B. demokratische oder wirtschaftliche Leistung). Trotz anhaltender Argumentation in dieser Debatte, dass freiwillige Vereinigungen in diesem Prozess von entscheidender Bedeutung sind, hat die empirische Forschung nur eine schwache Verbindung zwischen Mitgliedschaft und demokratischem (oder sozialem) Verhalten gefunden. In diesem Artikel gehen wir jüngsten Behauptungen nach, dass verschiedene Typen von Vereinigungen verschiedene Rollen spielen können. Basierend auf der sozioökonomischen Vielfalt innerhalb einer Vereinigung unterscheiden wir empirisch insbesondere zwischen heterogenen (bridging) und homogenen (bonding) Vereinigungen. Einen Datensatz über Mitgliedschaft in Vereinigungen in Flandern nutzend, werden wir empirisch in der Ansicht unterstützt, dass in (überwiegend) heterogenen oder homogenen Vereinigungen Werte und Verhalten in der Tat von Mitglied zu Mitglied verschieden sind.

Resumen Las actuales investigaciones científicas y las recientes iniciativas políticas revelan un profundo interés en conocer cuáles son los efectos del capital social en una amplia gama de resultados socioeconómicos, tanto a escala individual (p.ejm., actitudes cívicas) como de sociedad (p.ejm., rendimiento democrático y económico). A pesar de los persistentes argumentos que se han sostenido para defender la importancia de las asociaciones voluntarias en este proceso, las investigaciones empíricas suelen demostrar que la relación entre la pertenencia a asociaciones y las actitudes democráticas (o cívicas) es muy pequeña. En este trabajo, se hace un seguimiento del reciente argumento según el cual los distintos tipos de asociaciones pueden desempeñar papeles diferentes. En concreto, distinguimos, desde un punto de vista empírico, entre asociaciones que actúan como *punte* y aquellas que lo hacen como *nexo de unión*, en función de la diversidad socioeconómica existente en el seno de ellas. Basándonos en una serie de datos sobre la pertenencia a asociaciones en Flanders, hemos encontrado pruebas empíricas que sustentan la teoría de que los valores y las actitudes individuales difieren entre los miembros de las asociaciones que actúan como puente y las que actúan como nexo de unión, principalmente.

Keywords Voluntary associations · Bridging associations · Bonding associations · Civic attitudes · Social capital · Flanders

Introduction

Association membership empowers individuals and develops their democratic values, generalized trust, cooperative norms, racial and religious tolerance, and so on. At least, such arguments have been a recurrent theme in the social capital literature (Anheier and Kendall 2002; de Tocqueville 1835/1962; Hooghe 2003a). Empirical analyses at the individual level aiming to substantiate this relation have, however, not generated impressive results (Hooghe 1999; Freitag 2003; Li et al. 2005; Mayer 2003; Van Deth 1997; Whiteley 1999). Newton (1999, p. 185) therefore concludes that while membership of voluntary associations has some importance, its influence is “generally weak, though not trivial.”

The central argument of this paper is that such a conclusion may be overly strong. The reason is that membership in different types of associations does not necessarily engender similar outcomes. Theoretical contributions in the literature on social capital, for example, have long since acknowledged that social capital (or, less generally, participation in voluntary associations) is not guaranteed to produce positive outcomes (Portes 1998). It follows that members of different types of associations may well be characterized by different attitudes (either through self-selection into diverse organizations or due to different socialization effects within these various groups). In line with this argument, previous work has already uncovered that members of political or policy-oriented groups differ in terms of generalized trust from members of apolitical groups (Knack 2003; Stolle 2001; Wollebaek and Selle 2003). Also, Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Paxton (2002) point to the importance of organizational diversity in the production of social capital or the development of democratic attitudes, suggesting, most basically, that not all associations are alike. Erickson and Nosanchuk (1990) and Eastis (1998) point to one potential reason for this divergence across associations. They argue that it is crucial to regard what exactly association membership implies in terms of the number and, especially, the variety of the acquaintances people acquire. Even a bridge or choral club may engender increased political interest when a player or singer at times gets linked to people “who like to discuss politics, starts talking politics with them, and then talks politics more in general” (Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990, p. 217). Hence, it is not necessarily a large and diverse network of associations within a community which engenders positive externalities on society, but the diversity of potential contacts within individual voluntary associations—or their organizational characteristics—that is a crucial driving force for the beneficial nature of voluntary associations.

In the present paper, we extend this literature in two main ways. First, we regard the relation between association membership and a range of civic and political attitudes (i.e., political powerlessness, intolerance towards immigrants, utilitarian individualism, feelings of insecurity, and acceptance towards non-conformist behaviour) rather than restrict attention to one of these. This allows us to paint a somewhat broader picture of the relation between voluntary associations and their members’ attitudes. Second, and in line with the idea that the diversity of contacts one develops within an association is crucial (Rogers et al. 1975), we distinguish between *bonding* and *bridging* networks (Paxton 2002; Putnam 2000). The former

are associated with closed networks, while the latter entail cross-cutting or overlapping networks. Most generally, one might argue that “positive experiences with dissimilar individuals will have greater effects on the development of norms and values than will the relations with individuals who are similar to oneself in terms of their characteristics or behaviours” (Marshall and Stolle 2004, p. 130; see also Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990).¹ Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind at this point that “bonding and bridging are not either–or categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but more or less dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital” (Putnam 2000, p. 23). In fact, most organizations will bridge and bond to some extent, though the relative importance of these two elements may differ. As such, the empirical analysis incorporates this critical feature of associational membership.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The first section offers some theoretical perspectives on the relation between association membership and civic attitudes and introduces the need to distinguish between bridging and bonding associations. The next section employs data on voluntary association membership in Flanders in 2002 to test this proposition empirically. The last section addresses the main findings of this study.

Theoretical setting and previous literature

The positive relation between associational membership and individuals’ democratic values, interpersonal trust, and so on—as first described by de Tocqueville (1835/1962) and fully embraced in the social capital literature (Hooghe 2003a; Stolle and Rochon 1999)—has recently been in the spotlight, both within and outside the academic world. In fact, policymakers in various countries spend more attention to a flourishing associational life in their policy agenda. For example, one of the aims of the “Pact of Vilvoorde,” which was concluded at the end of 2001 by the Flemish government, was to make at least 50% of the Flemish population participate in an association by 2010. The reasoning was that through active participation in voluntary associations citizens feel more involved in society, hence increasing the democratic quality of Flanders. Similarly, and based on broadly similar arguments, Tony Blair underlined his plan to recover social life in the United Kingdom when he first took office in 1997. More generally, the notion of building social capital is, and has been, a popular theme among so-called “Third Way” politicians such as former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, former US president Bill Clinton, or former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

Despite this widespread enthusiasm, the mechanism through which association membership is supposed to affect members’ attitudes is far from clear. Most basically, three roads have been suggested in previous literature. First, a *socialization* logic has been proposed in which membership develops certain

¹ Note that this explanation presupposes a causal relation between association membership and value orientations (i.e., linking membership to value development through socialization effects). This need not be the case. Self-selection may also play an important role. We return to this discussion later on.

attitudes and norms within members (de Tocqueville 1835/1962; Putnam 1995). However, this absolute view, where members of an association develop “new” values and opinions, has been strongly criticized (Hooghe 2003c; Stolle 2003). In effect, it appears more likely that association membership “does not introduce qualitatively new values, but enforces already existing values” (Hooghe 2003c, p. 93; see also Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Such “peer group effects” have been extensively demonstrated in research on group interaction in social psychology and essentially imply that values do not develop out of nowhere within an association, but will rather tend to converge around pre-existing values and attitudes in the organization. While this line of reasoning clearly still believes in the existence of a socialization process, it is now “restricted” to “a process of value congruence within the group” (Hooghe 2003c, p. 92). Second, some scholars steer away completely from the socializing force of association membership and rather stress *self-selection* effects in which people with certain characteristics choose to join particular types of associations rather than others (Newton 1999; Whiteley 1999). Third, some have argued that both effects tend to be mutually reinforcing. That is, in general, trusting and joining reproduce one another (Brehm and Rahn 1997). The debate between these three strands of arguments is as yet far from resolved. While the present paper does not attempt to resolve this ongoing debate, it is of importance to keep in mind these three views when discussing our empirical results in the next section.

Interestingly, previous empirical evidence for the relation between voluntary association membership and value orientations has been relatively weak, especially when measured at the micro-level (Hooghe 1999; Freitag 2003; Li et al. 2005; Mayer 2003; Stolle and Rochon 1998; Van Deth 1997; Whiteley 1999; for early exceptions, however, see Almond and Verba 1963; Olsen 1972). Concluding that the above-mentioned theoretical discussion on the association–value orientation link is superfluous or that voluntary associations are not at all elementary to the safeguarding of modern democracy (Newton 1999) or to the establishment of generalized trust (Li et al. 2005) may, however, be premature. Indeed, theoretical contributions to the social capital literature have since long acknowledged that association membership will not necessarily entail positive externalities on the broader society, and may in some cases even lead to negative outcomes (Bourdieu 1985; Coleman 1988; DeFilippis 2001; Foley and Edwards 1996; Olsen 1972; Portes 1998). Moreover, Li et al. (2005) find that memberships in different types of associations do not load strongly on one underlying factor of “civic engagement.” This indicates that participation in various groups may well be conceptually different and that members’ civic attitudes may vary significantly across groups.

Some authors have previously acknowledged this possibility. For example, empirical studies distinguishing between political or policy-oriented groups (e.g., political parties or labour unions) and apolitical groups (e.g., church choirs and bowling leagues) generally support the contention that members of both groups differ in terms of generalized trust (Freitag 2003; Knack 2003; Stolle 2001; Wollebaek and Selle 2003). Another way to differentiate between various associations—taken up in the present study—depends on the notions of *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Paxton 2002; Putnam 2000). While bonding civic

engagement “brings together people who are like one another in important respects (ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and so on),” bridging social networks “bring together people who are unlike one another” (Putnam and Goss 2002, p. 11). This difference in the socioeconomic homogeneity/heterogeneity of both types of associations is of crucial importance. Indeed, it has been argued, as earlier quoted, that “positive experiences with dissimilar individuals may have greater effects on the development of certain norms and values than relations with individuals who are similar to oneself in terms of their characteristics or behaviours” (Marshall and Stolle 2004, p. 130; see also Bobo 1988). The argument can therefore be made that members of bridging associations are characterized more by social and democratic attitudes than members of bonding associations. Our analysis will empirically assess this hypothesis for a wide range of social and political attitudes. We thereby extend previous work by Stolle and Rochon (1998) and Paxton (2002). These authors find that bridging associations are associated with high levels of generalized trust and community reciprocity among their members (Stolle and Rochon 1998) and have a strong positive influence on democracy (Paxton 2002).

Analysis

We employ data from a survey conducted by the “Administration Planning and Statistics” (APS) of the Flemish government in 2002. This survey was administered to a sample of 1,477 individuals, representative of the total Flemish population. Two elements make this survey valuable for our study. First, the survey includes questions on membership in a wide variety of voluntary associations, which enables us to distinguish between different types of associations. Second, it contains a large number of questions probing individual’s civic and social attitudes. Both these characteristics are more extensively discussed in the next two subsections. Then, we present the empirical methodology employed and present the main results.

Measuring bridging and bonding membership

To distinguish between bridging and bonding associations, we argue that heterogeneous associational membership, compared to homogeneous membership, is more likely to bring members into contact with a broad sampling of the various groups in society (for a similar approach, see Stolle 2001; Stolle and Rochon 1998). This should make it easier to generate links or “bridges” between various socioeconomic groups within the association (Putnam 2000). Hence, bridging associations are defined as those that allow their members to easily generate links between socioeconomic groups in society while bonding associations generally fail to do so (Stolle 2001; Stolle and Rochon 1998).²

² Another approach that has been proposed to measure the bridging versus bonding nature of a voluntary association is through its connections to other associations—and thus to the wider society (Coffé and Geys forthcoming; Paxton 2002).

Specifically, we use data from the APS survey waves of 1999 and the period between 2001 and 2004 to assess the bridging or bonding nature of voluntary associations in Flanders.³ This provides a dataset of 7,276 individuals that were asked whether they were—or had been—active or passive members in various types of voluntary associations.⁴ Moreover, the dataset provides information on respondents' status on nine major socioeconomic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education level, religion, nationality, occupation, professional category, marital status, and whether or not one has children).⁵ These two forms of information can be linked to generate a measure of the bridging/bonding potential of various associations. As an extensive description of the methodology to do this is available in Coffé and Geys (2007), we here only briefly run over the main points.

Specifically, in a first step, data on individual's socioeconomic characteristics is used to generate a "diversity score" for each association as the average absolute difference between the population distribution and an association's membership distribution on a given socioeconomic trait.⁶ This score indicates how different the association is from the overall population on this particular trait. In a second step, after calculating these diversity scores for each association and all socioeconomic characteristics in the analysis, a composite indicator of each association's membership diversity (and thereby its bridging potential) was devised. To this end, it was necessary to normalize the raw diversity scores such that all socioeconomic dimensions in the analysis were treated on the same 0–1 scale (see Bowen and Moesen 2007, for a similar approach in a different setting). The normalized diversity scores were then added to reach an overall heterogeneity index for each association. This "sum of normalized diversity scores" has a minimum value of 0 and a maximum value equal to the number of socioeconomic dimensions retained in the analysis. Smaller numbers on the composite indicator reveal that the association's membership is more in line with that of the population and therefore likely to be more accessible to bridging across various socioeconomic groups *within* the association. Associations with low scores are therefore designated as bridging organizations, those with high scores as predominantly bonding groups (Coffé and Geys 2007; Stolle and Rochon 1998).

³ Note that this larger dataset could not be employed in the current study as the questions on social values and norms were, unfortunately, much less extensive in all but the 2002 wave of the survey. The question on voluntary association membership did not vary in style or content over the period, such that the results from the more extensive dataset are likely to carry over to the 2002 sample.

⁴ While similar data—based on, for example, World Values Surveys—have been used in previous work, they are less than ideal. The reason is that they are limited to associational types, and do not provide data on individual organizations. This aggregation problem requires caution in interpreting our results, but does not invalidate the methodologies proposed. The caveat mentioned here should, however, be kept in mind when considering the specific results from the analyses.

⁵ Clearly, other socioeconomic categories can be considered (e.g., language, race, ethnicity and/or geographical distance). This was not possible in the present study due to lack of data. In any case, it is important to consider a significant number of socio-demographic characteristics to avoid spurious inferences (Coffé and Geys 2007).

⁶ These are termed diversity scores to indicate how different the association is from the overall population on this particular characteristic. We agree that this may cause some confusion as a higher "diversity score" indicates a low level of bridging potential (or more homogeneous associations). We refrain from introducing new terminology here to keep in line with Coffé and Geys (2007).

The results are presented in Table 1 (for a more detailed assessment and extensions of the method, see Coffé and Geys 2007). The association types are ordered according to their position on a scale from most bridging (1) to most bonding (16). Hobby clubs appear to be the most successful in generating a heterogeneous membership. This is also the case for associations organizing artistic activities, humanitarian organizations (such as the Red Cross), and sports associations. This is an interesting finding given that these types of associations are generally unrelated to any religious pillar (*zuil*). Both in Belgium and The Netherlands, such pillarization (*verzuiling*) is a widespread phenomenon (Billiet 1993; Coffé 2002) and implies that certain types of organizations will mainly attract people with given religious and political features. Most of the women's associations and associations for retired people, for example, are part of a catholic pillar. Given that these associations—obviously—also consist of women and/or retired people respectively, both are designated as predominantly bonding in our analysis.

Rather than include 16 separate dummy variables for membership in the associations in our analysis, we have regrouped the 16 organizations into three categories. The first category is composed of the four most heterogeneous or bridging associations. The second category includes the eight associations that are neither extremely bridging nor bonding. The third and last category includes the four organizations with the most homogeneous or bonding profile. This three-way division creates a stronger divide between the two “extremes” of the scale, increasing the interpretability of results from analyses assessing the extent to which bridging associations outperform bonding ones (Coffé and Geys 2007).⁷ This is important because as stated: “bonding and bridging are not either—or categories into which social networks can be neatly divided, but more or less dimensions along which we can compare different forms of social capital” (Putnam 2000, p. 23).⁸ (Summary statistics of all variables can be found in Appendix A.)

⁷ As alternatives, we have also estimated the model including either 3 or 5 associations in the bridging and bonding categories and the remaining associations in the middle category. The results are comparable to the ones presented in the main text and are available upon request. One might also use the actual heterogeneity scores as weights in an additive index, but this is less than ideal given that the actual weights depend on the exact number of socioeconomic categories used in the analysis (a deficiency not encountered when using the relative heterogeneity scores or the various associations' rank order; as implicitly done in the main text).

⁸ In each case, the variable used in the analysis counts the number of memberships an individual claims in associations within each category. While membership in bridging and bonding associations thus can vary between 0 and 4 (when an individual is a member of none or all associations included in the respective categories), values for membership in the intermediate group can range from 0 to 8 (as there are eight association types in this category). This operationalization allows us to interpret the results in terms of the effect of one additional membership in a given category rather than the effect of at least one such membership. Hence, it includes a measurement of an individual's extent of involvement (Hooghe 2003a). Note, however, that this operationalization implies that a person who belongs to a number of sports clubs (which are bridging associations) and one youth association (which is a bonding type of association) will end up having the same scores on our membership variables as one who is in one sports club and various family associations. Ideally, we would like to give “weights” to the memberships in a given type of association (with the weights being the number of memberships within this category). Our data, unfortunately, do not allow us to do so as they merely indicate whether or not a person is member of at least one association of a particular type.

Table 1 Bridging versus bonding association types in Flanders

Association type	Sum of normalized diversity scores
Hobby club	0.883 (1)
Humanitarian organizations	1.215 (2)
Arts activities (literature, dance, theatre, music)	1.371 (3)
Sports associations	1.878 (4)
Neighbourhood committee	1.897 (5)
Organizations aiding elderly, handicapped, or deprived people	2.007 (6)
Local community advisory and school council	2.350 (7)
Associations linked to local pub	2.417 (8)
Third world development and international peace	2.787 (9)
Environmental and nature associations	2.969 (10)
Fan club	3.133 (11)
Socio-cultural associations	3.208 (12)
Family organizations	3.366 (13)
Youth associations	3.948 (14)
Women's groups	4.009 (15)
Associations for retired people	6.018 (16)

Source: Coffé and Geys (2007)

Measuring civic attitudes

For the measurement of individuals' social norms and attitudes, we employ five different variables: political powerlessness, intolerance towards immigrants, utilitarian individualism, feelings of insecurity, and acceptance of non-conformist behaviour. Each of these indicators is constructed through a principal component analysis using the responses on multiple related statements. Respondents' positions concerning each of these statements were retrieved using Likert-type scales providing five possible answers ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree" (Likert 1932). In general, reliance on the responses of individuals to a variety of such multi-item attitudinal statements allows for a better measurement of theoretical concepts than relying on just a single item (DeVellis 1991; Van Ryzin 2004). The reason is that it minimizes the consequences of measurement or interpretation error in the responses of individuals to single item questions. (All scales are described in Appendix B, where we also give the technical details of the components).

Our first indicator measures a utilitarian conception of individualism. This form of individualism is related to unrestrained striving for personal gain and success without taking account of others, thereby thus denying the importance of solidarity and reciprocity (Bellah et al. 1985; Elchardus and Derks 1998).⁹ Given that

⁹ This use of the concept of "utilitarianism" differs from the use of the term by—amongst others—Bentham. Bentham's doctrine of utilitarianism aimed at providing the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people—without government interference—and was preliminary concerned with maximizing overall social (rather than individual) benefit (Davies 1995). We acknowledge this theoretical point, but nonetheless employ the label "utilitarian individualism" here to keep in line with the previous sociological research on this topic (Elchardus and Derks 1998; Hooghe 2003a).

membership in voluntary associations is generally argued to lead to more social values and norms, one could expect that the prevalence of this utilitarian conception of individualism lessens among members of voluntary associations. This also follows from de Tocqueville's (1835/1962) idea that an individual's participation in voluntary associations increases his/her sense of interdependence with others, which is clearly opposite to individualism. Importantly, given that the ability and willingness to cooperate with different individuals may be especially stimulated in bridging associations compared to bonding ones (see above); we expect utilitarian individualism to decrease more strongly when a respondent is a member of associations with more bridging potential.

The second scale captures a respondent's intolerance towards immigrants. As with utilitarian individualism, this attitude can be interpreted as "antithetical to the notion of social cohesion and encompassing solidarity" (Hooghe 2003a, p. 51). Hence, if voluntary associations induce trust and democratic values among its members, agreement with a statement such as "immigrants cannot be trusted" clearly should be less probable among members of such associations. As before, we expect this effect to be stronger when the association is more bridging. The reason is that membership in a more heterogeneous association increases the probability of encountering a more diverse set of individuals. In line with Bobo's (1988) finding that absence of direct contact with citizens of other racial, ethnic, or class groups serves to reinforce prejudices, we expect membership in heterogeneous organizations to lower distrust and feelings of intolerance towards immigrants.

As a third measure, we look at respondents' acceptance of non-conformist behaviour such as body piercings, non-marital cohabitation, usage of soft-drugs, or the wearing of "provocative" clothing. We expect that membership in bridging voluntary associations is positively related to acceptance of such non-conformist behaviour (which is essentially intra- rather than inter-cultural). Or, at least, that this holds more strongly in bridging than in bonding associations, where people may be expected to be more inward-looking and thus more focused on the specific defining characteristics of their own group. The argument is that people in predominantly bridging voluntary associations are likely to be more open towards others and therefore may more easily accept a way of life that is not fully in line with traditional patterns in society.

Next, we introduce a scale designed to capture a respondent's general feeling of insecurity. The standard argument in the social capital literature holds that members of voluntary associations tend to exhibit higher levels of generalized trust (Hooghe 2003a; Putnam 1995; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Stolle and Rochon 1998). As it has been argued that insecurity accompanies distrust (Delhey and Newton 2005), we expect that association membership will tend to reduce feelings of insecurity. This effect is likely to be stronger for memberships in bridging associations as the development of trust in bonding associations is often argued to be limited to those involved in the group and thus may fail to extend beyond the group.

Besides these four civic attitudes and value orientations, we also look at a political attitude. To test whether association membership not only affects social

values, but also political ones, we introduce a measure of political powerlessness. The idea that members of associations feel more politically empowered has been stated since the classic study by Almond and Verba (1963), *The Civic Culture*. These authors claim that voluntary social interaction builds up feelings of confidence and safety in the social environment, which has political ramifications. In line with their findings, we hypothesize that members of bridging associations will have lower feelings of political powerlessness than members of bonding associations. The reason is that meeting a large variety of people within an association increases the probability of becoming acquainted at some point with someone who is interested in politics and to start talking about politics (Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990). This diversity of contacts in a bridging association thus may be of critical importance to increase political awareness and reduce a feeling of political powerlessness.

Estimation model

The five social and political attitudes enumerated in the previous section are the dependent variables in our empirical analysis. Hence, we estimate five separate individual-level models relating an individual's score on each of the mentioned attitudes to their level of participation in various types of voluntary associations. While the aim of this analysis is mainly explorative and not to develop a comprehensive explanation for the attitudinal scales, we do add a number of socioeconomic control variables in the model to reduce the likelihood of making spurious inferences. Hence, we estimate the following empirical model (subscript i referring to individuals):

$$\text{Value}_i = a + b_1 \text{Religion}_i + b_2 \text{Children}_i + b_3 \text{Gender}_i + b_4 \text{Age}_i + b_5 \text{Age}_i^2 + b_6 \text{Education}_i + b_7 \text{Married}_i + b_8 \text{TVtime}_i + b_9 \text{Membership}_i + e_i$$

Value_i in the above equation represents the component scores of the five political and social attitudes (derived from the PCA analysis described more fully in Appendix B) that are the respective dependent variables during the analysis. Religion_i is a vector containing three dummy variables: Non-practising Christians, Christians practising less than once a month, and Christians practising more than once a month (non-Christians act as reference group). As such, we capture both religious affiliation and practice (Billiet 1998; Hooghe 2003b). Gender_i is a dummy variable taking the value 1 for male and 0 for female respondents. Age_i measures the age of respondents in years. We always experimented with the squared value of age to check whether there was a significant non-linearity in the age effect. When this inclusion did not improve the explanatory value of the model, it was not retained in the final regression equation.¹⁰ Education_i represents a vector of three dummy variables. These take the value 1 for respondents of which the highest attained education level is lower secondary, higher secondary, or higher (i.e., university or college) education respectively (reference category are those with only lower or no

¹⁰ Note that this does not necessarily imply that the squared term should reach statistical significance.

education).¹¹ Married_i is a dummy variable equal to 1 for married respondents (0 otherwise). TVtime_i measures the average number of hours respondents watch television on weekdays. This is included as previous research has shown television watching to be significantly related with lower participation levels, increased intolerance towards immigrants, utilitarian individualism, and lower generalized trust (Freitag 2003; Hooghe 2002, 2003b; McBride 1998; Putnam 2000). Moreover, a broad literature on communication and broadcasting has argued that “television programming is successful in transmitting values, as well as in influencing the behaviour and emotions” of both adults and children (McBride 1998, p. 551n).¹² Finally, the set of variables central to our analysis is represented by Membership_i. We distinguish between membership in bridging and bonding associations as defined above. This allows us to test the main hypothesis that association membership may be differently related to an individual’s value orientations depending on the type of association one is involved in.

Estimation results

The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 2. Before turning to the results, it is worth mentioning that our regressions are generally well-specified and explain between 13% and 38% of the variation between respondents.

Let us start the discussion of the results with the central membership variable. We find that there often is a statistically significant relation between membership and more civic and social attitudes. This relation, however, appears to be mainly situated in memberships in associations in the bridging and middle categories.¹³ Indeed, the coefficient estimate for additional memberships in bonding associations is never statistically significantly different from zero. On the other hand, with the exception of the relation between membership in bridging associations and intolerance towards immigrants (which fails to reach statistical significance), additional memberships in associations with a high bridging potential are associated with more civic attitudes. A similar effect is also found for additional memberships in associations in the intermediary category. Our findings thus

¹¹ In preliminary estimations, we also added a variable measuring a respondent’s income to the model. This was, however, never statistically significant once education was controlled for. Moreover, the introduction of this variable strongly reduced the number of observations. Hence, we did not retain it in the final estimations. Still, none of the results were affected when income was included in the model, which indicates that our results appear robust to the decrease in sample size this variable’s inclusion entails.

¹² It has been argued that television watching as such is not the main problem, but that its effect depends on what programmes people watch (McBride 1998; Norris 1996). Ideally, we would thus like to differentiate between the types of programmes people watch. Unfortunately, however, our data do not allow us to make such distinctions.

¹³ Using dummy variables equal to 1 if an individual is member of at least one association within the respective categories (and 0 otherwise) leads to similar, but generally weaker, results. Note, however, that this may partly be due to the fact that in our sample 958 individuals (or roughly 75%) claim membership in at least one association. Hence, there is much less variation in the dummy variable compared to the number of memberships.

Table 2 Effect of bridging and bonding memberships on value orientations

Variable	Utilitarian individualism	Intolerance towards immigrants	Acceptance of non-conformism	Feelings of insecurity	Political powerlessness
Intercept	0.549*** (2.60)	-0.471*** (-3.37)	1.094*** (9.80)	-0.701*** (-5.06)	-0.714*** (3.25)
Religion (dummy: 1 = 'Christian, but never to church')	0.055 (0.77)	0.254*** (3.24)	-0.196*** (-2.94)	0.050 (0.66)	-0.008 (-0.10)
Religion (dummy: 1 = 'Christian and at most once a month to church')	-0.017 (-0.26)	0.208*** (2.92)	-0.378*** (-5.86)	0.125* (1.70)	-0.018 (-0.24)
Religion (dummy: 1 = 'Christian and at least once a month to church')	-0.153* (-1.66)	0.053 (0.57)	-0.661*** (-8.07)	0.147 (1.53)	-0.045 (-0.47)
Children (number of children)	-0.016 (-0.74)	-0.069*** (-3.19)	-0.006 (-0.34)	-0.069*** (-3.43)	-0.028 (-1.31)
Gender (dummy: 1 = male)	0.157*** (3.08)	0.015 (0.29)	0.134*** (3.08)	-0.310*** (5.84)	0.036 (0.70)
Age (in years)	-0.011 (-1.23)	0.013*** (6.56)	-0.019*** (-11.85)	0.018*** (9.13)	0.028*** (3.15)
Age squared	0.0001 (1.46)	-	-	-	-0.0002** (-2.23)
Education (dummy for lower secondary)	-0.350*** (-3.74)	-0.183** (-2.15)	0.045 (0.65)	0.020 (0.23)	-0.066 (-0.74)
Education (dummy for higher secondary)	-0.564*** (-5.96)	-0.345*** (-3.95)	0.245*** (3.61)	-0.014 (-0.16)	-0.232*** (-2.62)
Education (dummy for higher education)	-0.800*** (-8.17)	-0.730*** (-7.97)	0.515*** (7.02)	-0.313*** (-3.23)	-0.571*** (-5.94)
Married (dummy: 1 = married)	0.068 (1.11)	0.095* (1.64)	-0.220*** (-4.63)	0.075 (1.25)	0.041 (0.63)
Television time (average hours/day)	0.050*** (2.59)	0.053** (2.49)	-0.048*** (3.03)	0.045** (1.96)	0.051** (2.23)
Bridging associations (number of memberships)	-0.082** (-2.28)	-0.020 (-0.55)	0.063** (2.05)	-0.062* (-1.67)	-0.099** (-2.50)
Middle group of associations (number of memberships)	-0.150*** (-4.59)	-0.109*** (-3.44)	0.073** (2.46)	-0.096*** (-2.80)	-0.076** (-2.19)

Table 2 continued

Variable	Utilitarian individualism	Intolerance towards immigrants	Acceptance of non-conformism	Feelings of insecurity	Political powerlessness
Bonding associations (number of memberships)	-0.028 (-0.60)	-0.016 (-0.37)	0.043 (1.06)	0.011 (0.25)	0.039 (0.91)
<i>N</i>	1,359	1,293	1,327	1,267	1,357
<i>R</i> ²	16.55	20.99	39.69	18.35	13.12
RESET ³	0.48	1.22	6.62***	0.04	3.04**
F (bridging = middle)	1.63	2.81*	0.05	0.31	0.16
F (bridging = bonding)	0.73	0.01	0.15	1.06	5.07**
F (middle = bonding)	3.71*	2.63	0.34	2.47	3.78*
F (all coeff. equal)	1.98	1.97	0.17	1.25	2.88*

Note: *t*-Values based on heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors between brackets; ***significant at 1%, **at 5%, and *at 10%. RESET represents Ramsey's (1969) specification error test. *N* differs over the various specifications due to missing values for some of the attitude measurements

appear to provide some support for the hypothesis that different types of associations are differently related to individuals' attitudes (in line with Paxton 2002, and Stolle and Rochon 1998). Yet, one important caveat appears in order. Indeed, the coefficients for the various groups of associations mostly fail to be statistically different from one another at conventional significance levels (as attested by the F-tests in Table 2). The out-performance of the bridging and middle groups compared to the bonding group thus is (statistically) rather weak. While increasing memberships in non-bonding associations are generally associated with more civic attitudes (and an increase in the number of memberships significantly increases observed civicness), this increase in civicness with additional participations in non-bonding associations does not often outweigh that of additional bonding participations.¹⁴

We should note here that we do not intend to stereotype bonding social capital as bad and bridging social capital as good. In fact, there are instances in which bonding social capital has significant value. It can, for example, prove to be of crucial importance for particular groups in society who create niche economies (Leonard 2004). Also, it can fulfil a useful social function by providing support to people who feel politically powerless or insecure, or who suffer from bad health. Szreter and Woolcock (2004), in line with this argument, find that bonding social capital is important for people's health and well-being since it offers a vital source of social support. More recently, Brisson and Usher (2007, p. 71) assert that building (bonding) social capital in local communities may be viewed as an important "poverty reduction strategy" since it affects "asset-building outcomes in low-income community-based programs."

Before concluding, we briefly review the findings for our set of control variables. As far as religiosity is concerned, it can be seen that the extent of church practice by Christians at times makes a significant difference to their value orientations (compared to those of adherents of other religions or non-believers, which constitute the reference group).¹⁵ Indeed, even though non-practicing Christians are already significantly less tolerant towards social phenomena such as body piercings, non-marital cohabitation, usage of soft-drugs, or the wearing of "provocative" clothing, this degree of conservatism strongly increases with the frequency of church attendance. Similarly, although the differences fail to reach statistical significance (except for the Christian attending church at most once a month), more frequent

¹⁴ We experimented also with a more direct measure of "trust in (political) institutions" (in European, federal, regional, local government). The results of these additional analyses were not very convincing. In fact, none of the membership values is ever significantly related to "trust in (political) institutions." This indicates that our measure of political powerlessness is picking up something more (or different) than political trust.

¹⁵ Note that only a small group of respondents mention "other religion" as their faith. This precludes a test of whether other religions (such as, e.g., Islam or Judaism) have a different effect on value orientations. Still, a test of whether "free-thinkers" are significantly different from the remainder of the reference group turned out to be insignificant in all cases. Given these issues and the fact that this is not the central issue of our model, we decided to keep all non-Christians in one category.

church attendance strengthens feelings of insecurity. Also, we find that irregular Christian churchgoers and Christians who do not attend church are significantly more intolerant towards immigrants than adherents of other religions or non-believers (the reference group), while no such difference exists for regular Christian church attendants. These results are in line with previous research indicating that more frequent attendance at religious services is correlated with lower intolerance towards immigrants (Billiet 1998) and higher levels of generalized trust (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006). Utilitarian individualism and political powerlessness show a similar pattern: Christians become less individualistic and feel less politically powerless. In these cases, the differences are, however, at best marginally significant at conventional confidence levels.

The number of children a respondent has is associated with lower feelings of insecurity and intolerance towards immigrants. Male respondents are found to be significantly more individualist and open-minded about non-conformist behaviour, while they are also characterized by lower feelings of insecurity compared to women. The coefficients on age (and age squared) show that older respondents are significantly less tolerant towards non-traditional ways of life and immigrants (even after controlling for their higher religiosity), while they also feel less politically powerful and secure. Education has the effect generally observed in the literature (Freitag 2003; Hooghe 2003a; Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006). That is, higher education reduces utilitarian individualism, political powerlessness, feelings of insecurity, and intolerance towards immigrants and increases acceptance towards non-conformist ways of life. Higher education therefore appears to be an important provider of civic attitudes. Married respondents are more conservative and reject non-traditional behaviour. They also appear to be slightly less tolerant towards immigrants. Finally, increased television watching is shown to be significantly related to all our attitudes. It increases utilitarian individualism, political powerlessness, feelings of insecurity, and intolerance towards immigrants and decreases acceptance of non-conformist behaviour. These findings support previous claims about the destructive effect of television watching by, among others, Freitag (2003), Hooghe (2003b), Putnam (2000), and Robinson (1981).

Conclusion

Recent years have witnessed an intense interest—both in political and academic spheres—in the effect of social capital on individual's civic attitudes as well as societal outcomes such as democratic or economic performance. Voluntary associations are often argued to be of crucial importance in this process because they tend to socialize people into certain pro-democratic or pro-social values. Interestingly, this socialization idea has been severely criticized in the literature by scholars arguing that people with given social or democratic values and opinions may essentially self-select into these organizations. Moreover, empirical research usually reveals but a weak relation between membership and democratic attitudes.

The present paper starts from the idea that these weak results may be due to the possibly differential roles of various associations. Indeed, “some organizations broaden social networks, participants in others develop strong values that may or may not be supportive of democratic institutions, still other organizations train individuals in civic skill, and of course, some associations do all or some combination of these” (Eastis 1998, p. 76). Hence, as not all associations are the same (Eastis 1998; Knack 2003; Stolle 2001; Stolle and Rochon 1998; Wollebaek and Selle 2003), individuals with given characteristics may self-select into certain types of associations *or* members may develop civic attitudes only in certain types of groups. We offer some empirical evidence for this view. Particularly, we empirically distinguish between bridging and bonding associations based on the socioeconomic diversity within the association. This analysis illustrated that hobby, artistic, and humanitarian associations tend to be more bridging than associations for women and the elderly. In a second stage of the analysis, we then confirm that members in heterogeneous or bridging associations appear to be different with respect to their attitudes than members of bonding associations (Putnam 2000). Our findings thus show that it does not suffice to only take into account whether or not someone is a member in a voluntary association (or count the number of memberships an individual has). Rather, it seems advisable to complement the measurement of participation with information about the different types of associations a respondent is a member of. Members of various types of associations clearly adhere to different social and political norms and attitudes. An important caveat here, however, is that the cross-sectional data used in this study do not allow us to interpret our findings as evidence of causality. Nonetheless, the results clearly tie bridging social capital to attitudes.

Finally, it may be of interest to draw attention to the policy implications of our study. In fact, our findings suggest that bridging memberships indeed outperform bonding ones. Hence, this provides some support for the claim previously made (Turner and Nguyen 2005; Vidal 2004; Woodhouse 2006; Woolcock and Narayan 2000) that public policy towards the voluntary sector should focus on creating bridging social capital such as to obtain the best possible results. The fact that memberships in bonding associations are unrelated to civic attitudes suggests that spending public funds on these types of associations will not benefit wider society. Specifically, given the findings in the first part of our analysis, one might suggest that more attention should—in Flanders—be given to hobby, artistic, and humanitarian organizations compared to those for women and the elderly. Clearly, however, this conclusion cannot be taken too far as bonding social capital may fulfil a useful social function as well by, say, providing support to people who feel politically powerless or are physically ailing.

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Appendix A

Table A1 Summary statistics

Variable	Number of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Utilitarian individualism	1,421	−0.054	0.982	−2.262	2.989
Intolerance towards immigrants	1,354	−0.043	1.002	−2.254	2.056
Acceptance of non-conformism	1,389	0.007	0.993	−2.404	2.752
Feelings of insecurity	1,325	−0.022	1.012	−2.899	2.131
Political powerlessness	1,422	−0.023	0.996	−3.509	1.915
Religion (dummy: 1 = ‘Christian, but never to church’)	1,474	0.252	0.435	0	1
Religion (dummy: 1 = ‘Christian and at most once a month to church’)	1,474	0.370	0.483	0	1
Religion (dummy: 1 = ‘Christian and at least once a month to church’)	1,474	0.147	0.354	0	1
Children (number of children)	1,472	1.582	1.484	0	9
Gender (dummy: 1 = male)	1,477	0.486	0.500	0	1
Age (in years)	1,477	47.933	17.493	18	85
Education (dummy for lower secondary)	1,477	0.231	0.422	0	1
Education (dummy for higher secondary)	14,77	0.328	0.470	0	1
Education (dummy for higher education)	1,477	0.264	0.441	0	1
Married (dummy: 1 = married)	1,470	0.632	0.482	0	1
Television time (average hours/day)	1,472	2.426	1.531	0	13
Number of memberships	1,429	1.316	1.471	0	9
Bridging associations (number of memberships)	1,463	0.511	0.703	0	4
Middle group of associations (number of memberships)	1,460	0.451	0.773	0	5
Bonding associations (number of memberships)	1,448	0.355	0.615	0	4

Appendix B

As mentioned in the main text, we regard five social and political attitudes and norms. Each of these is operationalized through a principal component analysis including an individual’s answers to a number of related statements. Answers to these statements (ranging from four to eight depending on the attitude under

consideration) in each case were structured using a Likert-type scale with five answering categories (totally disagree [1] to totally agree [5]). In what follows, we give the respective statements employed for each of the attitudes and provide the information relative to the principal component analysis: i.e., the component weights for each statement, the eigenvalue, the percentage of explained variance, and the Cronbach's Alpha of the component.

Utilitarian individualism: Eight statements

- 0.79 In society, one better looks after himself/herself first.
- 0.79 In society, one has to fight for his/her own position, the rest follows automatically.
- 0.79 People should always pursue their personal pleasure and mustn't think too much about others.
- 0.78 It is important to strive in the first place for a prominent position for yourself.
- 0.75 Everybody has to take care of himself/herself first and defend his/her own interests.
- 0.69 What counts is money and power. The rest is just hot air.
- 0.66 People who know much can use this primarily to improve their own position.
- 0.63 Striving for personal success is more important than having good relations with others.

Eigenvalue 4.3

Explained variance 54%

Cronbach's Alpha 0.88

Intolerance towards immigrants: Four statements

- 0.85 Immigrants come here to take advantage of our social welfare system.
- 0.82 If the number of jobs decreases, immigrants should be sent back to their own countries.
- 0.82 Muslims are a threat to our culture and traditions.
- 0.80 In general, immigrants cannot be trusted.

Eigenvalue 2.7

Explained variance 67%

Cronbach's Alpha 0.84

Acceptance of non-conformism: Eight statements assessing individual's acceptance of:

- 0.75 Piercings.
- 0.74 Wearing provocative clothing.
- 0.74 The use of soft drugs (e.g., Cannabis).
- 0.70 Having different partners while all partners are informed about this.
- 0.64 Visiting a prostitute when one does not have a steady relationship.
- 0.60 The legal recognition of other forms of cohabitation than marriage.

0.59 Buying goods that one knows are illegal copies.

0.58 Consciously shocking people.

Eigenvalue 3.6

Explained variance 45%

Cronbach's Alpha 0.83

Feelings of insecurity: Seven statements

0.75 In the evening, one has to be very careful on the street.

0.72 Over the past ten years, streets have become more dangerous.

0.71 I do not open the door when someone rings at the doorbell in the evening or at night.

0.70 Out of fear of being robbed, I always immediately lock the car when I get in.

0.68 Alarm systems are no superfluous luxury these days.

0.67 When I am on holiday, I dare not leave my house unguarded.

0.66 The police are no longer able to protect us from criminals.

Eigenvalue 3.4

Explained variance 49%

Cronbach's Alpha 0.82

Political powerlessness: Five statements

0.81 Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.

0.78 Most politicians promise a lot, but they don't do anything.

0.73 There is no point to voting since parties do whatever they want.

0.72 Politicians have never learnt to listen to ordinary people like me.

0.64 If Parliament has voted in favour of an unjust law, there is little a citizen can do about that.

Eigenvalue 2.7

Explained variance 54%

Cronbach's Alpha 0.78

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